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Recommended Citation

Utah State University, "Educational Policies Committee Program Proposal, College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences, July 13, 2012" (2012). *Educational Policies Committee*. Paper 297.
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Utah State University
Center for Society, Economy and the Environment (CSEE)
CIP Code: 03.02

Section I: Request

Utah State University proposes to establish a center that builds on its existing institutional strength in the social science of human-environment interactions and the multitude of ways in which social and economic development conditions are linked to environmental amenities and natural resource assets. The Center for Society, Economics and the Environment (CSEE) will achieve four objectives. It will: (1) serve as a key research resource to community, state, regional, and national agencies and organizations; (2) act as an information source for social science projects aimed at environmental, natural resource, and development issues; (3) foster inter-disciplinary research relationships among USU faculty; and (4) enrich educational opportunities for students who are researching linkages between social, economic and environmental phenomena.

Section II: Need

The underlying premise of the proposed USU Center for Society, Economy and the Environment (CSEE) is that local environments, economies, and societies are highly interdependent, and that efforts to enhance any one of these will succeed when all three are considered together. Additionally, urban and rural regions of the state and region seek economic prosperity, diversity of their economic structure, and development of their communities in a socially and environmentally sustainable manner. Development of communities in Utah, the Intermountain West, and beyond relies upon wise use of a region's natural resource base in a manner that enhances the quality of life; this requires capacity to collect and analyze data that are relevant to policy issues, which many communities and agencies do not possess.

USU has a large number of social scientists engaged in research, education, and outreach activities at the nexus of societal decision making, economic development and valuation, and the environmental and resource base. These scientists, located primarily in the Departments of Applied Economics, Environment and Society, and Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology, share a long history of collaboration in both research and educational efforts. However, the absence of an established bridging infrastructure across the many colleges and departments in which research and outreach on socioeconomic and environmental topics occurs hinders the ability of these scientists to fulfill a key part of the USU Mission: "...to [serve] the public through learning, discovery, and engagement."

No entity within the Utah System of Higher Education has a center with a similar mission. The Utah State University Center for Public Lands and Rural Economics is funded by a federal line item, and focuses on health care, education, and quality of life in rural areas from a political science perspective. The Bureau of Economic and Business Research at the University of Utah conducts some public lands studies—particularly with respect to economic impact studies of Utah's energy resources—but for the most part is concerned with housing and real estate, construction, demography, and industry impact studies. Southern Utah University's Office of Regional Services facilitates community engagement between local, state, and federal governments as rural regions, particularly those in southwestern Utah, consider development alternatives. The SUU Office of Regional Services is primarily an outreach, rather than research, organization. The proposed CSEE would be unique among officially designated centers in the USHE: an interdisciplinary unit focused on original research highlighting the connection between socio-economic

development and Utah's environmental and natural resource base, in partnership with local, state and federal entities.

Section III: Institutional Impact

CSEE will serve as a key resource to community, state, regional, and national agencies and organizations whose missions or needs include issues involving the relationships between socioeconomic conditions and environment/resource conditions. The USU researchers to be affiliated with CSEE are experienced in management of competitive grants and contracts. The team leading this proposal has worked on a number of projects together, including a major public lands study for the Utah Governor's Office of Public Lands Policy Coordination Office. Collectively, the team has completed grants and/or contracts with state agencies (Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, Division of Water Quality, Division of Water Resources, State Parks and Recreation, and Division of Wildlife Resources) and federal agencies (US Department of Agriculture, US National Park Service, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Tennessee Valley Authority, US Geological Survey, and the US Army Corps of Engineers.) CSEE plans to leverage this wealth of experience in establishing a highly visible campus research entity.

As a coordinated and highly visible USU entity specifically designed to conduct contract-based research efforts, CSEE will allow USU to better serve the needs of agencies and organizations, and to more effectively bridge the research and outreach roles that are central to USU's mission as a Land Grant University. CSEE will use the USU Libraries Digital Commons system as a repository for its research and outreach products, allowing CSEE to serve as a clearinghouse and one-stop information source for extension personnel, agencies, organizations and individuals seeking to access research-based findings on the interplay of social/economic/environmental phenomena.

CSEE will engage faculty across several departments and colleges in collaborative research examining the ways in which social, economic, and environmental sustainability are linked. A preliminary list of potentially affiliated scientists reveal 18 faculty members located in the three affiliated departments. Faculty residing in other academic units, who share similar interests, will be welcome to affiliate with CSEE. In addition to enhancing interactions among social scientists whose work is linked to environmental and resource issues, CSEE will also provide a mechanism for more efficiently communicating the array of social science research expertise that exists at USU to physical and natural scientists across campus, with a goal of increasing opportunities for the pursuit of larger, integrated projects that require input from both the biophysical sciences and the social sciences.

Finally, CSEE will expand and enrich the educational opportunities available to students engaged in degree programs that include a focus on the linkages between social, economic and environmental phenomena. CSEE will generate new funding and project-based training opportunities for students via project-funded research assistantships, fellowships, or project internship positions. M.S. and Ph.D. students from Applied Economics, Environment and Society, and Sociology are expected to benefit from CSEE activities. While we do not anticipate any new degree programs or curricula as a result of CSEE activities, students in core participating departments will benefit from increased collaboration and coordination in educational activities and events, such as visiting speaker series, faculty/student seminars, etc. In addition, the ability of CSEE to engage faculty from participating departments in more regular interaction will enhance opportunities to coordinate curricular offerings, including cross-departmental course offerings.

Section IV: Finances

CSEE will function largely through the sponsored research efforts of affiliated faculty members, with some partnering from the Utah Agricultural Experiment Station (UAES) to support marketing and contracting activities. UAES has also demonstrated support by granted "release time" to scientists leading the CSEE effort. CSEE leadership is applying for a UAES seed grant to handle CSEE start up expenses.